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Feelings & the Therapeutic Encounter/Alliance

Emma Condon

Edith Cowan University

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ARTCAP SYMPOSIUM

INSCAPE

Feelings and the Therapeutic Encounter/Alliance

Emma Condon

The essential inner nature of a person, emotion, thing.

A person, emotion, thing. The characteristics of. Essence of a person emotion thing.

Therapy.

Become part of your inner self. Connect with it. Dance with it. Play with it. Be it.

Think it. Dream it. Love it. Embrace it. The inner nature of yourself. This is what makes us us. You you. Me me. People people. This is what makes us human. What is your inner essence? What is it that makes you you? What is it that makes therapy therapy? What is the essential inner nature of therapy? Accepting nature?

Understanding? Listening? Being? Being? Being. Therapy. Art therapy. The image.

Being with the image. The person. Being with the person.

My image will formulate as a portrait of the self, of myself, selves; of questions that have arisen for me, and ultimately my experience doing the art therapy Masters.

The self.

My experiences as a trainee art therapist.

Intense.

I really want to exhibit work, but I don't know what to write. Too much going on in my head. Too many reflections. So much has happened in the last two years. This time has been intense.

I will begin with my piece of art exhibited in this exhibition.

It is a construction of the self. Of myself during the course of being in Perth (the duration of my studies in art therapy). It has been a major learning process for me.

The image: it will be about transformation, learning and growth. It will represent myself as I began the course parallel to representing myself now nearly finishing the course. My eyes have grown wiser; I am wiser; more knowledgeable not only about therapy, or myself, but about life, love, individuation etc. (or are all these ultimately combined?) and so many other aspects of being alive. At times I have felt as though something has significantly changed in me. It feels so strong that it feels like a physical shift inside.

As I learn and grow; change; learn and grow. I continue to open my mind to new things. I embrace new challenges. I began the course with an open mind, ready and waiting to learn; ready and waiting to embark on my journey to become an art therapist.

At the time of my interview I was in Germany visiting for three months. It was a bitter cold winter's morning at 8am when John Henzell and Jane Armstrong called. I was very nervous, but ultimately confident that I was prepared, and would get through this interview. I felt good about it. I felt that this was what I was meant to be doing (and in hindsight, really it was).

It was to be, that in early February 2001 I packed my bags with all my life's belongings and departed Adelaide to go and make my life in Perth. I was eager to start the course, eager to begin my journey, eager to become an art therapist.

I embarked on, not only my journey to helping other people (although this is huge part in this journey), also my journey to discover aspects of myself which were long buried, and/ or unrealised. I have learnt so much. I have thought so much about people, about things. Things I may have never thought about. Contemplating what is going on for me in the therapeutic encounter. What exactly am I feeling? What exactly do I perceive they (the client) are feeling? How do these feelings affect the therapeutic encounter? How can they benefit the therapeutic encounter? Maybe we are all in one way or another searching for "authentic personal existence" as Maurice Friedman¹ discusses; client and therapists alike.

Is it part of human nature to search for self-discovery? Why are we here? Who am I really? Will we always be searching for understanding? What am I to achieve before I die? Have I done enough in his life? Have I fulfilled my life quota of experiences?

Understanding the “Mana-Personality”² helps one to understand more about the Self.

Henderson (1990)³ explains this in his opening pages when he quotes from Jung

(1928/1966, pp.235, 236):

Its power lies in a “superior wisdom” and a “superior will” and therefore must be dissolved through conscious assimilation of its contents...back to ourselves as an actual living something poised between two world-pictures and their darkly discerned potencies. This “something” is strange to us and yet so near, wholly ourselves and yet unknowable...This something claims all that and more, and having nothing in our hands that could fairly be opposed to these claims, it is surely wiser to listen to this voice...I have called this centre the *Self* (17).

Just a few weeks ago I had a sudden all-consuming desire to write. I wrote everywhere I went; waiting for the train, on the train, even as I walked on the side walks I wrote in my head. I had not experienced this for a long while. Some sense of creativity had been sparked within me. I had triggered a long dormant desire to express creatively. Since this moment, not so long ago, I have not been able to stop my mind from imagining and playing. Something within me has changed. I don't quite know what, but as I explained earlier, it feels so strong that it feels like a physical transformation, like some kind of wheels turning, moving my Self to a new stage of being. This is what I want to capture in my piece.

¹ Maurice Friedman (1967) *To deny our nothingness; Contemporary images of man*. p.17. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

² Termed by Jung C.G. (1928/1966), as being ‘the Self’ in ‘The relations between the ego and the unconscious’. In *Collected works*: Vol. 7. *Two essays in analytical psychology* (pp. 123-125). Princeton: Princeton University Press. Original work published 1928)

³ Henderson, J.L. (1990). *Shadow and Self; Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology*. Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications.

All of this change and way of being which I have talked about has not come about on its own. A lot has happened for me in the last two years. My experience as a therapist on placement has been a huge experience, and very insightful. Learning the ways in which one interacts in the therapeutic alliance, learning how brave people can be to explore and wonder about their inner workings. What is going on for them; these people, who for whatever their circumstance, come to be in therapy?

I will end these words, this piece, with part of poem which I wrote when I first began the course, after a dear friend of the family, back on Kangaroo Island, died;

“Life is so short. Shorter for some; those who have achieved what they have set out to, in this life, maybe...

Life, life is so tangible. It moves, it bends and stretches. It takes us all the way up, and then all the big drop down.

Life is very peculiar. Very peculiar indeed.

Dear life, dear death.

And life goes, it goes, it goes on. One ends and another will begin. It can be both beautiful and ugly.

What a tangible existence.”